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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The policy development of clear indoor air law in Taiwan

Jiang *et al* found that tobacco smoking is associated with a risk of dying from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) in a case-spouse control study.¹ However, the mortality of smoker's spouses who did not smoke was not examined. Secondhand smoke (SHS) is truly fatal to non-smoking adults and has led to diverse respiratory diseases in children.² In 2004, 603,000 deaths were attributable to SHS, comprising about 1 % of worldwide mortality.³ Borrowing experience from the United States (US), negative economic effects smoke-free policies are trivial because the US government will save \$6 billion/year from the direct and indirect medical cost for SHS-related disabilities and premature deaths. Meanwhile, neither significant adverse impacts on the hospitality industry nor a dramatic drop of local restaurant business is noted.⁴ Regarding the potential emotional burden imposed upon society, surprisingly, recent years have witnessed a steady increase in the trend of attitude toward smoke-free policies at indoor places in the US. By contrast to general opinion, the promotion of smoke-free legislation may actually facilitate social progress and harmony in our society. Therefore, Taiwan should endeavor to investigate the socioeconomic issues related to SHS first to see if the same conclusions are reached and then strive to convert public consensus into a realistic policy.

How can this goal be reached at an executive level? Currently, the major force that has led anti-tobacco campaigns in Taiwan is the John Tung Foundation (JTF) along with the Taiwan Medical Alliance for the Control of Tobacco (T-MACT). However, the influence of civic groups on smoking control is very limited owing to lack of funding and resources. To create a durable anti-tobacco coalition, connections with religious groups such as the Tzu-Chi Foundation, Dharma Drum Mountain and Fo Guang Shan Monastery must also be established. Apart from stable sources of funding, these Taiwan Buddhist organizations

and other religious parties have impeccable moral standards and faithful images with neutral political standpoints. If the coalition can eventually form a united tobacco control network, it will become a strong force for promoting tobacco control in our country. Now is the right time to make every effort to promote an indoor clean air act and to engage public awareness of active smoking as well as SHS as major threats to human health.

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